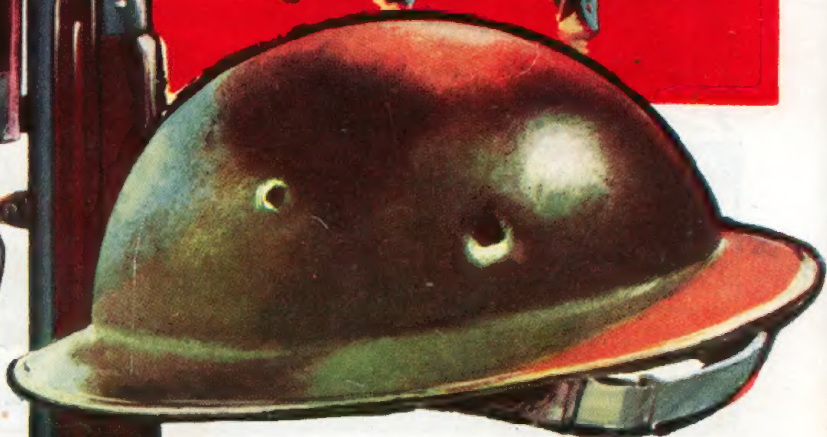


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JAWS OF HELL



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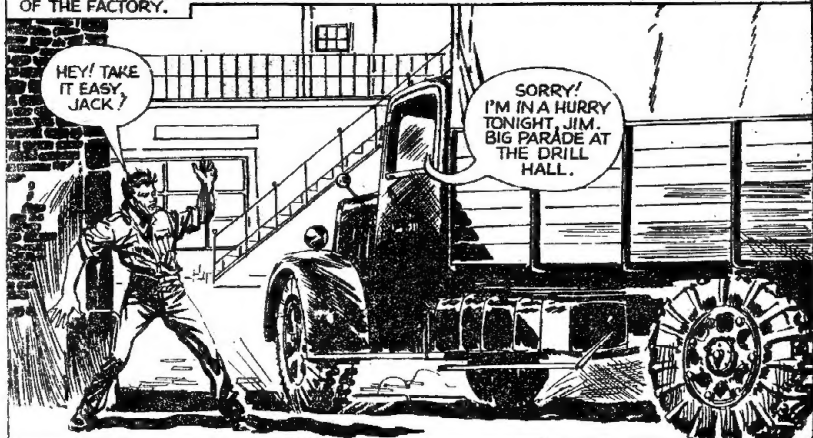
JAWS of HELL

WORLD WAR II SAW SOME OF THE BLOODIEST BATTLES IN HISTORY. YET CONFLICT BETWEEN MEN OF DIFFERENT CREEDS AND AMBITIONS WAS NOT ALWAYS CONFINED TO THE CLASHES BETWEEN POWERFUL ARMIES. BITTER RIVALRIES BETWEEN MEN WHO PUT THEIR AMBITIONS ABOVE THEIR COMMON CAUSE SOMETIMES ERUPTED INTO PRIVATE WARS.



Chapter 1. Their Different Ways

TYRES SCREECHING, THE POWERFUL CIVILIAN LORRY SWUNG OFF THE ROAD INTO THE YARD OF THE FACTORY.



JACK CHARLTON, A LANCE CORPORAL IN THE TERRITORIAL ARMY, TURNED THE LORRY INTO ITS BAY AND SLAMMED ON THE BRAKES.



THE CURT ORDER STOPPED JACK CHARLTON IN HIS TRACKS. CURBING HIS IMPATIENCE, HE STARED ENQUIRINGLY UP AT PAUL LAWRENCE, SON OF THE OWNER OF THE FIRM.



DISMAY GRIPPED CHARLTON. DESPITE HIS DISLIKING FOR THE OVERBEARING PAUL LAWRENCE, HE BEGAN TO PLEAD TO BE EXCUSED...



Jaws Of Hell

INSTANTLY, A LOOK OF GLOATING TRIUMPH CROSSED LAWRENCE'S FACE AS HE SAVOURED THE POWER HE HELD...

I DON'T CARE ABOUT THAT! YOU'RE EMPLOYED HERE AS A DRIVER AND YOU'LL DO AS YOU'RE TOLD! IF YOU DON'T LIKE IT, YOU CAN FIND ANOTHER JOB!

YES, SIR.

RAGING INWARDLY, JACK CHARLTON TURNED BACK TO HIS TRUCK.

ONE OF THESE DAYS, LAWRENCE, I'M GOING TO GET EVEN WITH YOU!

CHARLTON MADE THE LATE DELIVERY, THEN RANG CAPTAIN FORBES.

I'M SORRY I MISSED THE PARADE, SIR. I HAD TO WORK LATE. I ASKED TO BE EXCUSED, BUT...

I'M SORRY, TOO, CHARLTON. I WANTED TO SEE YOU ON A CERTAIN MATTER, BUT IT'S NO LONGER IMPORTANT.

CAPTAIN FORBES SIGHED RUEFULLY AS HE PUT DOWN THE PHONE...



THE SERGEANT MAJOR'S EXPLANATION WAS LOGICAL, FOR MANY MEN COULD NOT AFFORD TO LOSE THEIR JOBS IN THOSE PRE-WAR DAYS...



Jaws Of Hell

TIRED, HIS ANGER AT LAWRENCE ABATED, JACK CHARLTON ARRIVED HOME.



JACK KNEW HIS MOTHER WAS RIGHT. BUT HE ALSO KNEW THAT ARGUING WITH LAWRENCE JUST WAS NOT WORTH WHILE.



BY THE FOLLOWING SEPTEMBER, KEEPING A JOB SUDDENLY ASSUMED MUCH LESS IMPORTANCE. WITH THE OUTBREAK OF WAR, THE TERRITORIALS WERE AMONGST THE FIRST TO BE MOBILISED.



JACK CHARLTON'S VIEWS ON THE LENGTH OF THE WAR WERE FAR FROM ACCURATE, HOWEVER, WITH THE BRITISH EXPEDITIONARY FORCE HE FACED THE SAVAGE MIGHT OF THE NAZI BLITZ-KRIEG AS IT DROVE THROUGH BELGIUM INTO FRANCE.



Jaws Of Hell

THEY HELD ON FOR DAYS, DENYING THE ENEMY THE BREAKTHROUGH THAT WOULD UTTERLY DESTROY THE MAIN BRITISH FORCE. THEN THEY, TOO, PULLED BACK TO THE RAVAGED BEACHES OF DUNKIRK.



SERGEANT GARRITY, JACK'S SECTION N.C.O., COULD GLEAN LITTLE COMFORT FROM THEIR ESCAPE.



Jaws Of Hell

9

CHARLTON'S LEAVE AS A DUNKIRK SURVIVOR WAS SHORT. ON HIS ARRIVAL BACK AT CAMP, HE WAS CALLED TO CAPTAIN FORBES' OFFICE.



Jaws Of Hell

JACK CHARLTON SAILED THROUGH HIS OFFICERS' TRAINING COURSE, AND EMERGED A FULLY-FLEDGED SECOND LIEUTENANT. POSTED TO THE SECOND BATTALION OF HIS OLD REGIMENT, HE FOUND HIMSELF ALMOST IMMEDIATELY EMBARKING FOR OVERSEAS...



THEIR DESTINATION, INDEED, WAS NORTH AFRICA. THEY WERE THE FIRST REINFORCEMENTS TO THE DESERT ARMY THAT WAS TO HOLD EGYPT AGAINST THE CONCERTED ATTACKS OF THE AXIS FORCES.



THE FLUCTUATING FORTUNES OF THE DESERT CAMPAIGN KEPT LIEUTENANT JACK CHARLTON HOTLY ENGAGED FOR MOST OF THE NEXT TWO AND A HALF YEARS. THEN CAME THE INVASION OF ITALY, THE ASSAULT ON THE ENEMY-OCCUPIED MAINLAND OF EUROPE.



THIS IS OUR CHANCE, LADS! STRAIGHT THROUGH 'EM AND GIVE 'EM A TASTE OF OUR STEEL!

WE'RE WITH YOU, SIR!

CHARLTON HAD GROWN LEAN AND WHIPCORD TOUGH. EACH SUCCEEDING BATTLE HAD HARDENED HIM INTO THE MOULD OF AN EFFICIENT FIGHTING MAN.



KAMERAD!

YOU WERE RIGHT, SIR. THOUGH HOW YOU KNEW THEY'D FOLD UP BEATS ME.

ONE GETS A FEEL FOR THESE THINGS, SAR'NT. BUT I THINK THE JERRIES ARE BEGINNING TO HOLD A LINE NOW...

THAT GERMAN LINE HELD THROUGH THE WINTER, A BITTER WINTER OF FIGHTING PATROLS THAT TAXED MEN AND RESOURCES TO THE UTMOST.

Jaws Of Hell

FRESH TROOPS WERE NEEDED. FAR BEHIND THE LINES AT TARANTO, A BRITISH TROOPSHIP DISGORGED REINFORCEMENTS.



AMONGST THOSE REINFORCEMENTS WAS THE 10TH BATTALION OF JACK CHARLTON'S REGIMENT - AND SERVING IN IT WAS LIEUTENANT PAUL LAWRENCE.

THE 10TH BATTALION WAS SOON IN ACTION, THOUGH ON ANOTHER SECTOR OF THE BRITISH FRONT. THEIR LINE OF ADVANCE TOOK THEM ONE SPRING DAY TO THE SLOPES OF MOUNT GAGNANO...



THE COLONEL GLANCED BRIEFLY AT CAPTAIN RENNIE. PERHAPS THE MAN SHOULD BE RELIEVED? HIS EFFICIENCY HAD DROPPED ALARMINGLY. BUT AMONG HIS OFFICERS NONE — INCLUDING THE BUMPTIOUS LAWRENCE — WAS SUITABLE FOR COMPANY COMMAND.



ONE HOUR AFTER DARK, WITH PERFECTLY-TIMED MORTAR COVER, BAKER COMPANY PUT IN THEIR ATTACK.



Jaws Of Hell

IF THE FEROCITY OF THE ASSAULT WAS EQUALLED BY THE SAVAGERY OF THE DEFENCE, THE 10TH BATTALION'S ADVANCE WAS HELD UP BY CRACK NAZI SS TROOPS WHO FANATICALLY HELD ON TO THEIR POSITIONS.



IF THE RIVER HAD BEEN WIDER, FEW WOULD HAVE REACHED THE FAR BANK. BAKER COMPANY ESTABLISHED A TENUOUS BRIDGEHEAD AND DUG IN TO COVER ABLE AND CHARLIE COMPANIES AS THEY BEGAN TO CROSS.



PAUL LAWRENCE SAW HIS COMPANY COMMANDER HIT - AND HIS FIRST THOUGHTS WERE FOR HIS OWN VICIOUS AMBITIONS.



AT FIRST LIGHT, CAPTAIN RENNIE WAS EVACUATED WITH THE REST OF THE WOUNDED.

LOOK AFTER BAKER COMPANY, PAUL - THEY'RE GOOD LADS!

DON'T WORRY, SIR.

MISTER LAWRENCE, THE COLONEL WANTS TO SEE YOU RIGHT AWAY, SIR.



THE SUMMONS FROM THE BATTALION COMMANDER COULD MEAN ONLY ONE THING TO PAUL LAWRENCE.

THIS IS IT, HARRY! I'M BEING GIVEN THE COMPANY!

YOU DESERVE IT, PAUL!



Jaws Of Hell

LAWRENCE REPORTED TO COLONEL QUINCY WITH JUBILANT EAGERNESS... HIS FUTURE IN THE ARMY WAS BEGINNING TO SHAPE UP NICELY...

BAD SHOW ABOUT POOR RENNIE, THE BATTALION IS TO HAVE A FEW DAYS' REST OUT OF THE LINE... YES, TOM, WHAT IS IT?

A SIGNAL YOU SHOULD SEE, SIR.

MAJOR TOM HOPKINS, SECOND-IN-COMMAND, GLANCED QUICKLY AT PAUL LAWRENCE AS HE LED THE C.O. TO ONE SIDE...

I SEE, TOM. I WAS JUST ABOUT TO GIVE BAKER COMPANY TO LAWRENCE...

THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT, SIR. YOU'D BETTER READ THE SIGNAL.

LAWRENCE'S MIND WAS PLANNING THE RE-ORGANISATION OF BAKER COMPANY AS MAJOR HOPKINS AND COLONEL QUINCY FINISHED THEIR SHORT CONVERSATION.

... I'LL BREAK SERGEANT GARRITY DOWN TO PRIVATE AGAIN AND PROMOTE WILLIAMS. I'LL MAKE BAKER COMPANY A RED-HOT UNIT...

A FRESH ITEM OF NEWS, LAWRENCE. AS YOU'RE HERE, YOU MIGHT AS WELL HEAR IT AT ONCE.



NEXT MOMENT, HIS DREAMS OF COMMAND WERE RUDELY SHATTERED



A CAPTAIN HAS JUST BEEN POSTED TO THE BATTALION, LAWRENCE. SO BAKER COMPANY IS IN LUCK... CAPTAIN CHARLTON CAN TAKE OVER AS SOON AS HE ARRIVES

SCARCELY ABLE TO MOUTH AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT, LAWRENCE SALUTED AND TURNED AWAY.

THIS CAPTAIN CHARLTON HAS A VERY GOOD RECORD, SIR. HE CAME UP THROUGH THE RANKS—A FINE OFFICER, I BELIEVE.

HE'LL NEED TO BE, TOM, TO COPE WITH BAKER COMPANY AND LAWRENCE!



PAUL LAWRENCE REJOINED BAKER COMPANY—HIS NO LONGER. THE NAME CHARLTON MEANT NOTHING TO HIM. HE HAD LONG SINCE FORGOTTEN THE KEEN YOUNG LORRY DRIVER IN HIS FATHER'S EMPLOY.



WE'RE MOVING BACK FOR A FEW DAYS' REST—AND WE'RE GETTING A NEW COMPANY COMMANDER. I WANT THE COMPANY SMARTENED UP TO RECEIVE HIM, SERGEANT GARRITY.

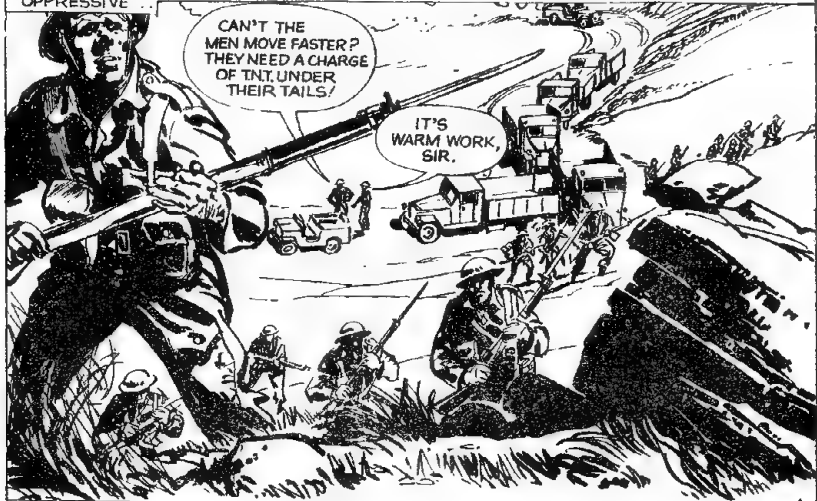
NEW COMMANDER! NO WONDER LAWRENCE IS LOOKING SO HAPPY—I DON'T THINK!

Chapter 2. Dangerous Rescue

THE REST FOR THE MEN OF THE 10TH. BATTALION WAS SOON OVER. THE GERMANS WERE BEING PUSHED BACK SLOWLY, FIGHTING SAVAGELY FOR EVERY INCH.



CAUTIOUSLY, THE MEN OF BAKER COMPANY BEGAN TO MOVE UP THE SLOPE. THE SUN BEAT DOWN AND DUST LAY THICKLY ON LIPS AND TONGUES. THE SILENCE WAS HEAVY AND OPPRESSIVE.



THE SNARL OF A JEEP'S ENGINE REACHED LAWRENCE AND HIS CSM. THEY TURNED TO STARE DOWN THE DUSTY TRAIL...

I DON'T CARE HOW WARM IT IS, SERGEANT-MAJOR. THE MEN NEED TO BE DRIVEN!

NEW ARRIVAL, SIR. I WONDER IF IT'S...?



THE JEEP SKIDDED TO A STANDSTILL AND ITS PASSENGER LEAPT OUT. HE STARED UP KEENLY AT HILL 806

WELL, WE'RE HERE, SIR. DON'T LOOK VERY INVITING, DOES IT?

IT'S ALL IN A DAY'S WORK, SAMMY!



Jaws Of Hell

THE CAPTAIN, JACK CHARLTON, LOOKED AT THE OFFICER STANDING NEARBY... AND LIEUTENANT PAUL LAWRENCE LOOKED AT THE NEWLY-ARRIVED CAPTAIN. RECOGNITION WAS MUTUAL AND INSTANTANEOUS.



LAWRENCE TURNED AWAY AS IF HE HAD NOT SEEN CHARLTON'S OUTSTRETCHED HAND..

THE OPERATION HAS JUST STARTED. I PRESUME YOU WILL WISH TO TAKE OVER—SIR!



CHARLTON EYED THE OTHER NARROWLY, TRYING TO GAUGE THE REASONS FOR THE MAN'S RUDENESS.

WHAT THE BLAZES IS BITING LAWRENCE?



BEFORE PAUL LAWRENCE COULD GIVE HIS NEW COMPANY COMMANDER ANY BRIEFING THERE CAME A SUDDEN WIDESPREAD CRASH OF MACHINE-GUN FIRE, AND A LETHAL CRUMP OF NAZI MORTAR BOMBS...



IN SECONDS, HILL 806 HAD BECOME A DEATH-TRAP BUT PAUL LAWRENCE COULD ONLY THINK OF THE RAGING HUMILIATION THAT SEETHED WITHIN HIM.

THAT OAF CHARLTON!
CAPTAIN CHARLTON!
HE'S JUST A LORRY
DRIVER - HE WORKED
FOR ME - HE CAN'T
POSSIBLY BE ANY USE
IN COMMAND...



Jaws Of Hell

JACK CHARLTON AND HIS CSM. RACED UP THE HILLSIDE TOWARDS THE NEAREST GROUP OF MEN.



THE CAPTAIN SKIDDED TO A HALT AMONGST HIS HUDDLED RIFLEMEN...



SERGEANT GARRITY SUDDENLY NOTICED THE THREE "PIPS" ADORNING JACK CHARLTON'S EPAULETTES...



THE WARMTH OF THE MEETING WAS DISSIPATED BY THE DESPERATE NEEDS OF THE MOMENT...

WELL, SIR, I WAS JUST THINKING WE COULD SNEAK AROUND THROUGH THAT GULLY THERE...

GOOD IDEA, SAR'NT. COME ON THEN.

THERE WAS A CONTENTED GRIN ON GARRITY'S FACE AS HE NOTED THE DETERMINED SET OF THE CAPTAIN'S JAW. JACK CHARLTON SEEMED TO KNOW WHAT HE WAS DOING.



Jaws Of Hell

THE GULLY AFFORDED THEM COVER FROM THE KEEN EYES AND MERCILESS GUNS DOMINATING HILL 806. MOVING SWIFTLY AND QUIETLY, CHARLTON'S SECTION TRAVERSED THE HILLFLANK.



LOOKS LIKE THIS IS WHERE WE JUMP 'EM, SIR.

DIDN'T LIEUTENANT LAWRENCE RECONNOITRE THE HILL, GARRITY? DID HE JUST WALK IN HERE BLIND?

SERGEANT GARRITY HAD NO HESITATION ANSWERING THAT ONE...

RECONNOITRE? HE WAS TOO BUSY WHIPPING THE COMPANY TO THINK OF A THING LIKE THAT, SIR.



MAKING A MENTAL NOTE OF GARRITY'S REPLY, CHARLTON TURNED HIS ATTENTION TO THE SLOPE.

HOLD YOUR FIRE UNTIL THE LAST MOMENT. READY?



THE SURPRISE WAS COMPLETE AND OVERWHELMING. THE HARSH STAMMER OF THE: SPANDAUS FADED UNDER THE WITHERING FUSILLADES FROM TOMMY-GUN, RIFLES AND BREN...



Jaws Of Hell

ANOTHER GROUP OF NAZIS WERE SITED ON THE LOWER PART OF THE HILL AND THEIR BULLETS BEGAN TO RAKE CHARLTON'S SECTION AS THEY CAME OUT INTO THE OPEN.

SERGEANT GARRITY'S HIT! AND THOSE SPANDAUS WILL CUT HIM TO PIECES ANY MINUTE...



SNAPPING A COMMAND TO THE BREN GUNNER, THE COMPANY COMMANDER FLUNG HIMSELF DOWN THE SLOPE.

COVER ME - AND MAKE IT GOOD!



BULLETS WERE CRACKING BOTH WAYS PAST CHARLTON AS HE SHOT FORWARD.



TO SERGEANT GARRITY, THE APPEARANCE OF HIS EX-LANCE CORPORAL WAS LIKE A DREAM.

WHAT'S THE TROUBLE WITH YOU, THEN, GARRITY?

COPPED ONE THROUGH ME FOOT, JACK - I MEAN, SIR, CAN'T WALK...



CHARLTON SMOTHERED A SMILE AND GRASPED HIS SERGEANT WITH STEADY HANDS...

COME ON, THEN - LET'S GET TO HECK OUT OF HERE!



jaws Of Hell

STUMBLING AND PANTING UP THE SLOPE, THEY FELL HEADLONG INTO THE FIRST AVAILABLE COVER...



AT THAT MOMENT, PRECEDED BY A SHOWER OF GRENADES AND A BLAST OF COVERING FIRE, LIEUTENANT HARRY BATES LED UP THE REST OF BAKER COMPANY. THE GERMAN POSITION WAS OVERRUN.



Chapter 3. Unfit for Command

SLOWLY, PAINFULLY, THE ALLIED ARMIES CLAWED THEIR WAY UP THE SPINE OF ITALY. BAKER COMPANY OF THE 10TH. BATTALION SEEMED UNABLE TO SETTLE DOWN, FOR THE INFANTRYMEN REACTED UNEASILY TO THE TENSION BETWEEN THEIR COMMANDER AND LIEUTENANT LAWRENCE.



Jaws Of Hell

A WRY SMILE SPREAD OVER THE LEAN FEATURES OF SERGEANT GARRITY



WELL, NOW, SIR. 'TIS A LONG STORY. SINCE WE LAST MET, I'VE BEEN DOWN TO PRIVATE AND UP TO SERGEANT SO MANY TIMES THAT I'VE LOST COUNT!

I NEED A CSM., GARRITY. I'M PREPARED TO RECOMMEND YOU FOR WARRANT OFFICER CLASS TWO. HOW DOES THAT APPEAL TO YOU?



NOW YOU'RE IN COMMAND OF THE COMPANY, IT STRIKES ME AS OKAY, SIR. BUT THE COLONEL'LL QUERY IT.

CHARLTON FELT RELIEF. HE BADLY NEEDED THE SUPPORT OF A FRIEND IN BAKER COMPANY.



YOU LEAVE THE COLONEL TO ME, GARRITY.

WHAT'S ALL THIS ABOUT A SERGEANT-MAJOR?

I'LL JUST GO AND CHANGE THE GUARD, SIR...

GARRITY LEFT IN A HURRY. HE HAD NO DESIRE TO BE PRESENT WHILE CHARLTON AND LAWRENCE WERE ARGUING OVER HIM.



IN LAWRENCE, THE MEMORY THAT THIS MAN HAD ONCE WORKED FOR HIM RANKLED... THE RANK CHARLTON HELD MEANT NOTHING...

I'M RELUCTANT TO PULL RANK ON YOU, LAWRENCE. BUT I WILL ASK YOU TO REMEMBER THAT I AM IN COMMAND OF BAKER COMPANY.

LIKE AT HILL EIGHT-O-SIX? WHEN YOU RAN OFF ABOUT YOUR OWN HEROICS AND LEFT THE ORGANISATION TO ME? IF I HADN'T BEEN AT THE CP THE COMPANY WOULD HAVE GOT OUT OF HAND...

THE IDEA STRUCK CHARLTON AS NOVEL. BUT HIS ACTIONS COULD HAVE BEEN INTERPRETED THAT WAY. HE WOULD HAVE TO WATCH LAWRENCE CAREFULLY THE MAN WAS DANGEROUS...

THAT'S NOT QUITE CORRECT...

COLONEL QUINCY WILL SEE IT THAT WAY... YOU'RE NOT FIT TO COMMAND MEN, CHARLTON! I OUGHT TO KNOW...

SERGEANT GARRITY BRUSQUED HIS MEN THROUGH THE GUARD CHANGE. HIS THOUGHTS WERE BACK AT THE COMPANY CP, WONDERING WHAT WAS GOING ON BETWEEN JACK CHARLTON AND LAWRENCE...



SERGEANT GARRITY WAS NOT WRONG. MEMBERS OF A TOUGH GRENADEER BATTALION WERE CLOSER THAN THE BRITISH SOLDIERS DREAMED...



HAUPTMANN KARL VON MULLER STARED THROUGH POWERFUL ZEISS GLASSES ON THE TINY VILLAGE OF SAN ROSARIO, DOZING IN THE SCORCHING HEAT, THE BRITISH APPEARED HALF ASLEEP, THEIR SENTRIES THINLY POSTED AND NO ARTILLERY WITHIN CALL.

A TEMPTING TARGET,
HANS. A COMPANY COULD
TAKE THE VILLAGE...

THEY DO NOT SEEM ALERT,
HERR HAUPTMANN. PERHAPS
A NOON ATTACK WOULD TAKE
THEM COMPLETELY BY
SURPRISE.

THE NAZI BATTALION WAS TOUGH, EXPERIENCED AND CUNNING IN FIGHTING A DEFENSIVE BATTLE.

PRECISELY MY THOUGHTS, HANS.
A CAREFUL APPROACH, A SMOTHERING
BLAST OF COVERING FIRE FROM
THE EIGHTY-EIGHTS AND MORTARS,
AND THE BRITISH WILL NO
LONGER OCCUPY SAN
ROSARIO...

THE SUN BLAZED DOWN, THE SILENCE FELL THICKLY, AND THE WAR WAS A MILLION MILES AWAY. PRIVATE ANDY SIMPSON STANDING GUARD AT THE END OF SAN ROSARIOS SINGLE MEAN STREET COULD SCARCELY KEEP HIS HEAVY EYELIDS OPEN...



PRIVATE ANDY SIMPSON GOT HIS SIESTA... IT ARRIVED UNHERALDED IN THE EVIL CRACK OF AN EXPLODING 88 MM. SHELL... A SIESTA FROM WHICH HE WOULD NEVER AWAKE.



Jaws Of Hell

UNDER A COVERING HAIL OF SHELLS AND MORTAR BOMBS, HAUPTMANN KARL VON MULLER'S SHOCK COMPANY CRASHED INTO SAN ROSARIO.



THAT SHOCKING ABRUPT ONSLAUGHT THUNDERED DOWN ON THE CONFUSED AND SCATTERED BRITISH... THEY RALLIED UNDER THEIR SERGEANTS AND BEGAN TO FIGHT BACK WITH BITTER VENOM...



ANOTHER STRUGGLE WAS VIOLENTLY TERMINATED BY THE GREATER CONFLICT RAGING IN SAN ROSARIO'S OLD STREET...



INCISIVE WORDS SNAPPED FROM CHARLTON LIKE THE LASH OF A WHIP. HE RACED FOR THE DOOR. BAKER COMPANY WAS IN SERIOUS TROUBLE...



Jaws Of Hell

THE CRY OF WARNING REACHED CHARLTON TOO LATE...



AN ALMOST SPENT BULLET CLANGING AGAINST HIS STEEL HELMET DRAGGED BLACK CURTAINS OF DRUGGED AND STUPEFIED DIZZINESS ACROSS CHARLTON'S BRAIN... HE STARED ABOUT UNCOMPREHENDINGLY...



YOU ALL RIGHT, SIR?

YES... I'M PERFECTLY ALL RIGHT, GARRITY...

CHARLTON SPOKE FAMILIAR WORDS... BUT IN THE ROARING CHAOS IN HIS BRAIN HE STRUGGLED WEAKLY TO FIND SANITY... TO CLAW HIMSELF BACK INTO THE WORLD AND THE REALITY OF WHAT WAS GOING ON...



MY PLATOON CAN'T HOLD THE END OF THE STREET MUCH LONGER, SIR. CAN I WITHDRAW THEM NOW?

ORDERS FOR THE MORTAR PLATOON, SIR?

PLATOON. END OF STREET... MORTARS?

THE SITUATION FOR BAKER COMPANY WAS SERIOUS. CAUGHT OFF GUARD, SMASHED INTO BY A SHOCK FORCE OF CRACK NAZI TROOPS, THEY NEEDED CLEAR-HEADED LEADERSHIP, INSPIRED COMMAND ...



BUT THAT ROLLING-UP PROCESS RECKONED WITHOUT THE UNYIELDING BULK OF SERGEANT GARRITY...



Jaws Of Hell

FOR A MOMENT THE ROLLING TIDE OF FIELD GREY HALTED, STEMMED BY THE KHAKI LINE THRASHED INTO SHAPE BY GARRITY.



LURID FIRE AND THE STINK OF CORDITE ENGULFED THE ONCE-PEACEFUL VILLAGE OF SAN ROSARIO... MEN CLASHED IN THE HAMMER OF AUTOMATIC WEAPONS AND THE EVIL CRUNCH OF GRENADES, AND CAPTAIN JACK CHARLTON CROUCHED IN THE RUBBLE LIKE A SPINELESS AND USELESS WAX FIGURE...



THOSE CRISP ORDERS WERE NOT QUITE THE SAME AS THOSE CHARLTON WOULD HAVE ORDERED... BUT AT LEAST THIS WAS LEADERSHIP... BAKER COMPANY COULD RALLY UNDER FIRM COMMAND...



CONFUSION AND WORSE CONFUSION... TWO DIFFERENT IDEAS WORKING AT ONCE... IN THE SMOKE AND FLAME OF COMBAT, MEN'S LIVES WERE TOSSED AWAY, RED BLOOD RAN USELESSLY...



Jaws Of Hell

SEETHING WITH FURY, GARRITY PULLED HIS MEN BACK. THEY LOST HEAVILY AS THEY RETIRED — GOOD MEN SLAUGHTERED BY THEIR OWN MORTARS...



THIS WAS THE MOMENT OF LIEUTENANT PAUL LAWRENCE'S TRIUMPH. HE HAD SEEN HIS HATED RIVAL CRUMPLE UNDER THE IMPACT OF AN EMERGENCY... NOW HE, PAUL LAWRENCE, WAS WHERE HE SHOULD BE, IN COMMAND OF BAKER COMPANY...



THE SOUR RESPONSE OF LAWRENCE DID NOT TAKE THE CORPORAL BY SURPRISE.

I DIDN'T ASK FOR YOUR OPINIONS, CORPORAL. JUST GET WORD THROUGH TO BATTALION AND TELL COLONEL QUINCY THAT CAPTAIN CHARLTON HAS FAILED TO MEET THE EMERGENCY AND THAT I AM IN COMMAND.



CORPORAL DUFFY MILLER TOOK HIMSELF OFF WITH A RUEFUL GLANCE AT THE SMASHED RADIO. SOME POOR BLIGHTER WAS IN FOR A LONG TREK BACK TO BATTALION - IF HE COULD MAKE IT OUT OF THE GERMAN CLUTCHES IN SAN ROSARIO...

POOR OLD CAPTAIN CHARLTON! PITY - HE WAS A DARN SIGHT BETTER OFFICER THAN THAT LIEUTENANT LAWRENCE...



AND THEN SERGEANT GARRITY ERUPTED STORMING ON THE COMPANY CP.

WHAT'S GOING ON DOWN HERE? WHERE'S THAT CLOWN WILLIAMS? CORPORAL MILLER! HAVE YOU SEEN THE CAPTAIN?

HE'S HERE, SERGEANT. HE'S - HE'S NOT HIMSELF, IF YOU SEE WHAT I MEAN.



Jaws Of Hell

GARRITY LOOKED DOWN WITH HORRIFIED EYES ON JACK CHARLTON. THE CAPTAIN MOANED A LITTLE AS HE LAY THERE - YET HE WASN'T WOUNDED!

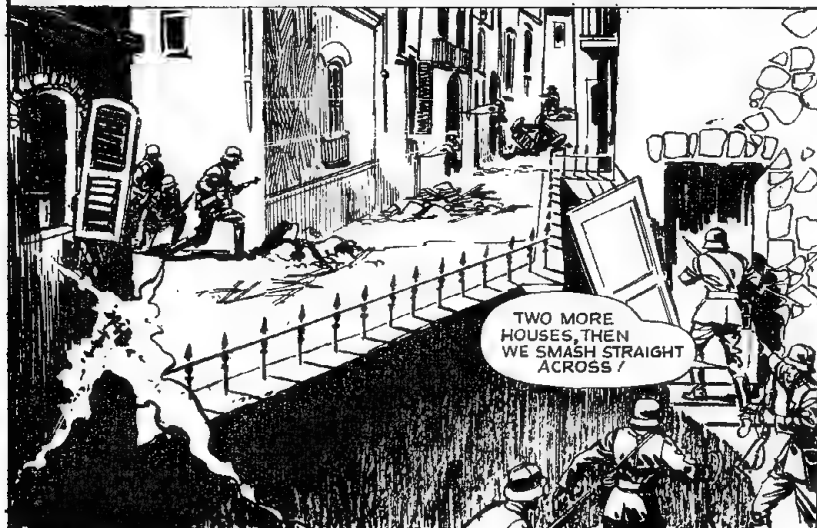


BUT THE WAR WOULDN'T WAIT. NAZI FIRE AND STEEL CLUTCHED SAN ROSARIO IN A STRANGLING GRIP. SMOKE AND FLAME STAINED THE BRIGHT NOON-DAY SCENE. THE INCESSANT CRACKLE OF SMALL-ARMS FIRE BATTERED AT TIRED NERVES...

OUR OWN MORTARS BLASTED ME AND THE MEN UP FRONT! TELL WILLIAMS TO SHOOT STRAIGHT NEXT TIME... AND THE JERRIES ARE INFILTRATING THROUGH THE HOUSES ON BOTH SIDES.



LIEUTENANT LAWRENCE KNEW WHAT HE WAS DOING— BUT SO DID THE GERMANS!



THAT VITAL SECTOR HAD BEEN LEFT UNDEFENDED... THE DEFENCE BOX ORDERED BY CHARLTON, BEFORE HIS CRUEL BLOW, HAD NEVER BEEN SET UP...



Jaws Of Hell

SURROUNDED, OUTNUMBERED, ENFEEBLED BY HEAVY LOSSES, THE REMNANTS OF BAKER COMPANY GATHERED IN THEIR HQ. LIEUTENANT LAWRENCE STARED AT THE USELESS RADIO AND DEAD TELEPHONE, AND BIT HIS LIP.



HERE'S THE CAPT'N. HE'S HAD A CLOUT ON THE HEAD, KNOCKED HIM DIZZY.

YOU KNOW YOU'RE ON A CHARGE, GARRITY? INSUBORDINATION AND OFFENSIVE LANGUAGE TO A SUPERIOR OFFICER.

GARRITY'S FIRST THOUGHT WAS TO LAUGH... HOW STUPID COULD LAWRENCE GET? BUT THE BLAST OF A FRESH NAZI ONSLAUGHT BROUGHT EVERYONE TO THE PRESSING NEEDS OF FIGHTING. EVERYONE, EXCEPT JACK CHARLTON...



I'LL BE HAPPY TO BE ON A CHARGE... IT'LL MEAN I'M STILL ALIVE, ANYWAY...

STRANGE SOUNDS HAD BEEN PENETRATING CHARLTON'S BRAIN... NOISE, LIGHT, THE FLAT TASTE OF BURNT POWDER... AND HE HAD A FEARFUL HEADACHE...



WHAT'S GOING ON? MY HEAD! MUST BE AN ATTACK... YES, I REMEMBER...

FORCING HIMSELF TO RISE WITH HIS LAST OUNCE OF WILL POWER, CHARLTON CRAWLED OUT INTO THE CHAOS.



THE ATTACK! LAWRENCE - DID YOU ORGANISE YOUR PLATOON INTO THE DEFENSIVE BOX?

JACK! YOU'RE OKAY AGAIN!

OKAY WASN'T THE WORD TO DESCRIBE JACK CHARLTON JUST THEN... BUT EVENTS BEGAN TO STREAM BACK TO HIS CONSCIOUSNESS AND HE REALISED THE FULL PERIL OF THEIR SITUATION.



NO TIME FOR DEFENSIVE BOXES NOW... I TOOK OVER WHEN YOU FAILED... IF IT HADN'T BEEN FOR ME THE COMPANY WOULD HAVE BEEN OVERWHELMED.

I REMEMBER... IS THIS ALL WHO ARE LEFT?

Jaws Of Hell

UNDER THE DEAFENING CRUMP OF NAZI MORTAR BOMBS AND THE INSANE SHRIEKING OF AUTOMATIC WEAPONS, BAKER COMPANY STOOD TO FOR THEIR LAST FIGHT...



BACK AT BATTALION HQ, COLONEL QUINCY DID MORE THAN THAT. HE JUMPED INTO THE FIRST JEEP AND LED THE RELIEVING FORCE PERSONALLY... AND HE RADIOED THE R.A.F. TOO...



THE MASTERY OF ITALIAN SKIES ACHIEVED BY THE ALLIED AIR FORCES ONCE AGAIN PROVED THE DEATH KNELL TO NAZI HOPES OF QUICK CONQUESTS. A SQUADRON OF LOW-FLYING SPITFIRES WINGED IN WITH CANNON, BOMB AND ROCKET...



CAUGHT IN THAT FIRST LETHAL BLAST OF FIRE, HAUPTMANN KARL VON MULLER CEASED TO HAVE ANY FURTHER INTEREST IN THE BATTLE...



Jaws Of Hell

THE SPITFIRES BEAT UP THE GERMANS IN SAN ROSARIO. BLINDED BY SMOKE AND FIRE, DEAFENED BY CONSTANT EXPLOSIONS, THE TASTE OF CORDITE AND DEFEAT BITTER IN THEIR MOUTHS, THE NAZIS REELED UNDER ONE MORE BLOW...



FROM THEIR ISOLATED FOX-HOLES THE REMNANTS OF BAKER COMPANY DASHED OUT TO JOIN IN THE PURSUIT. THE NAZIS WERE BUNDLED OUT, BOOTED BACK TO THE HILLS...



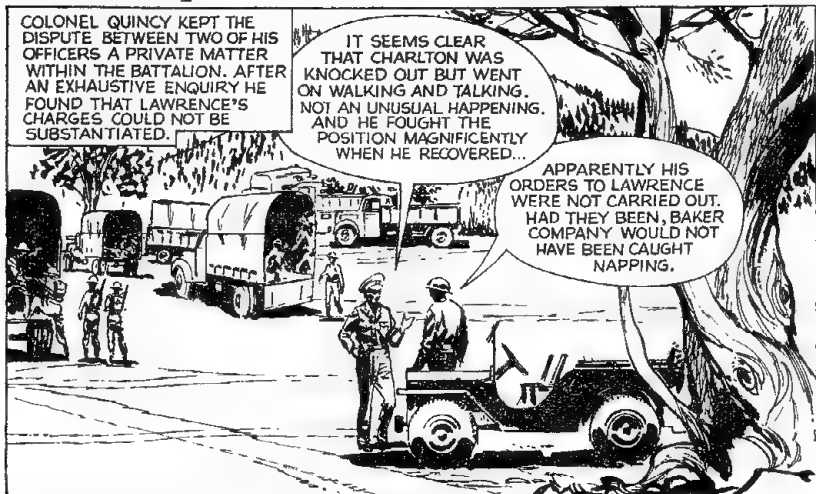
WHEN COLONEL QUINCY ARRIVED HE WAS MET, NOT BY A DIFFICULT BATTLE SITUATION, BUT BY A DIFFICULT MATTER OF THE RELATIONS BETWEEN TWO OF HIS SUBORDINATES.



PAUL LAWRENCE KNEW HE WAS RIGHT. JACK CHARLTON HAD PROVED HIMSELF TO BE UTTERLY UNFIT TO COMMAND. AND NOTHING THE EX-LORRY DRIVER COULD SAY WOULD ALTER THAT.



Chapter 4. The Acid Test



THE COLONEL KNEW THAT MAJOR TOM HOPKINS HAD A HIGH REGARD FOR CAPTAIN CHARLTON. AND THEY BOTH REGARDED PAUL LAWRENCE WITH DISTRUST. BUT, STILL...

IT'S BETTER FOR LAWRENCE TO BE POSTED TO ANOTHER COMPANY. BUT I WISH THIS HADN'T HAPPENED...

THE MATTER COULD HAVE BEEN SERIOUS, SIR. BUT I THINK YOU HANDLED IT THE BEST WAY...

SO THE MATTER WAS FILED AWAY. BUT STILL THAT FIERCE RESENTMENT SMOLDERED IN PAUL LAWRENCE. HE FELT ABSOLUTELY CONVINCED THAT CHARLTON HAD BROKEN DOWN UNDER THE STRAIN OF COMMAND...

WELL, I'M OFF TO CHARLIE COMPANY, HARRY. YOU WATCH THAT CHARLTON! HE AND GARRITY FAKED UP THAT INJURY STORY... THE MAN'S USELESS...

I'LL REMEMBER, PAUL. HATE TO SEE YOU GO.

SOON, THE 10TH. BATTALION MOVED UP TO THE FRONT AGAIN, TO BE LOOSED AGAINST THE NAZI DEFENCES OF THE LORANO RIVER.

HIS GRUDGE AGAINST ME IS JEALOUSY. HE PRETENDS IT ISN'T, BUT HE CAN'T FORGET I ONCE WORKED FOR HIS FATHER...



THE 10TH. BATTALION'S TASK WAS THE TOUGHEST IT HAD YET FACED. THE LORANO RIVER DEFENCE WAS A MINIATURE SIEGFRIED LINE SET DOWN ON ITALIAN SOIL - AND UNDER IT.

THE SCOTTISH BATTALION WILL MAKE THE FIRST CROSSING. AS SOON AS THEY'RE ACROSS WE FOLLOW THROUGH AND ESTABLISH A BRIDGEHEAD - AND WE HOLD ON - AT ALL COSTS!



Jaws Of Hell

THE 10TH WAS FRESH AND RESTED. THEY WAITED IMPATIENTLY FOR THE NEXT DAY AND THEN, AS SOON AS THE SCOTTISH BATTALION HAD GONE IN, THEY FOLLOWED UP FAST...



CAPTAIN CHARLTON TOOK BAKER COMPANY INTO THE CENTRAL SECTION OF THE NARROW PERIMETER. THEY WATCHED IN AWE AS A STUPENDOUS BARRAGE CRASHED OVER THEIR HEADS, PLUNGING DOWN ON THE NAZI POSITIONS.



THERE WAS NO DESPONDENCY IN CHARLTON'S QUIET WORDS, ONLY A GRIM WARNING. THE SAME THOUGHTS WERE VOICED BY COLONEL QUINCY.

LET'S HOPE THE BARRAGE IS MORE EFFECTIVE THAN USUAL, TOM. JUMP OFF IN TEN MINUTES, RIGHT?

THAT'S RIGHT, SIR. EVERYONE AT THEIR START LINE AND RARIN' TO GO!

THE BARRAGE LIFTED, THE BRITISH INFANTRY TENSED FOR THE JUMP OFF - AND THEN THE NAZIS STRUCK BACK!



THAT FIRST BLAST OF NAZI FIRE AND STEEL HAMMERED DOWN ON BATTALION HQ...

Jaws Of Hell

BADLY WOUNDED, THE COLONEL AND MAJOR HOPKINS LAY SIDE BY SIDE IN THE CHURNED-UP MUD OF THE RIVER BANK. AROUND THEM CHAOS SHRILLED IN THE FRENETIC DANCE OF GERMAN SHELLS AND MORTAR BOMBS.

BATTALION HQ'S
FINISHED / YOU'VE
GOT TO - GOT TO....

I KNOW, SIR.
HEY! STRETCHER
BEARERS! STRETCHER
BEARERS!

OVER ON CHARLIE COMPANY'S SECTOR OF THE BRIDGEHEAD LIEUTENANT PAUL LAWRENCE STARED DOWN IN HORROR AT THE BLOODY REMAINS OF COMPANY HQ.

THE CAPTAIN'S
COPPED IT, SIR. YOU'RE
IN COMMAND NOW...

BUT WHAT
CAN WE DO?
WE CAN'T JUMP
OFF INTO THIS!

OUT FROM THEIR UNDERGROUND DUGOUTS SWARMED THE NAZIS, BACK INTO THE FIGHT, UNTOUCHED BY THAT FEARFUL BARRAGE. AND THE LIEUTENANT DESPATCHED BY THE WOUNDED COLONEL AT LAST REACHED CAPTAIN JACK CHARLTON...

BATTALION HQ'S OUT OF IT, JACK. THE COLONEL HANDED OVER COMMAND TO YOU...

COR! WHAT A TIME TO TAKE OVER!

THE JERRIES ARE OBVIOUSLY BREWING UP A BIG COUNTER ATTACK... GARRITY... TELL MISTER BATES TO HOLD ON HERE WITH HIS EYE-LASHES... I'M GOING BACK TO BATTALION.

THE QUICK DECISION MADE, CHARLTON DID NOT HESITATE. THE BATTALION **HAD** TO HOLD ON TO THIS TENUOUS BRIDGEHEAD... THE LIVES OF HUNDREDS OF MEN WOULD BE WASTED IF THEY FAILED...

STILL CAN'T RAISE A THING, SIR...

NEVER MIND ABOUT REAR... CALL UP THE COMPANIES AND TELL THEM TO HALT WHERE THEY ARE - AND STAY PUT!

Jaws Of Hell

FOR CHARLTON THERE ENSUED A NIGHTMARE PERIOD OF STRAIN, OF QUICK DECISIONS, OF NO TIME FOR THOUGHT AS THE GERMANS PRESSED MERCILESSLY UPON THE 10TH. BATTALION'S LINES. *BUT HE HELD ON!*



BITTERNESS ROSE IN CHARLTON. HE KNEW THAT PAUL LAWRENCE WAS COMMANDING CHARLIE COMPANY NOW... AND CHARLIE HAD CRACKED...



THE RANK SMELL OF A BATTLEFIELD CHOKED CHARLTON'S LUNGS... THE ETERNAL CRACK OF BULLETS... THE CRUMP OF HIGH EXPLOSIVES... THE SCREAMS OF DYING MEN TORE AT HIS NERVES.

THIS IS JERRIES LAST GASP... IF WE CAN ONLY HOLD 'EM NOW...

THE 10TH. ROSE TO THE NEEDS OF THE HOUR UNDER THE DYNAMIC LEADERSHIP OF JACK CHARLTON. *THE 10TH. HELD THEIR POSITION!*



Jaws Of Hell

THE SHATTERED REMNANTS OF CHARLIE COMPANY REELED INTO BATTALION LINES... THEY WERE POUNCED ON WITH SAVAGERY BY CHARLTON AND GARRITY, PUNCHED INTO SHAPE AND FLUNG BACK INTO THE STRUGGLE!

THAT'S AS FAR AS YOU GO, CHARLIE COMPANY! THE JERRIES ARE GOING TO BREAK ANY MINUTE!

GET BACK INTO THE LINE, YOU DOZY LOT!

LIEUTENANT PAUL LAWRENCE TOTTERED INTO BATTALION HQ... CHARLTON MET HIM. AND THERE WAS NO FRIENDSHIP IN THE EX-LORRY DRIVER NOW...

BUT IT'S NO GOOD! THEY'RE ALL OVER US! WE'LL HAVE TO RETIRE...

YOU TAKE ONE STEP TO RUN AWAY, LAWRENCE, AND I'LL KILL YOU! THE 10TH WILL HOLD THIS POSITION AND IN ABOUT TEN MINUTES WE'LL ADVANCE... AND YOU'LL BE IN THE FRONT OF THAT ATTACK..

STUNNED AND BATTERED, LAWRENCE HEARD THE WORDS THROUGH A RED ROARING IN HIS BRAIN. HE FELT TRAPPED. TRAPPED BETWEEN THE IRON AND FLAME OF THE NAZIS AND THE STEEL DETERMINATION OF THE MAN HE DESPISED...

YOU'RE UNDER MY COMMAND, LAWRENCE, AND YOU'LL OBEY MY ORDERS! NOW SORT YOUR COMPANY OUT AND GET READY TO JUMP OFF!



SHAKING FROM THE VIOLENCE OF HIS ANGER, CHARLTON HOLSTERED HIS REVOLVER. MEANWHILE, THE GERMAN TROOPS, SHAKEN BY THEIR HEAVY LOSSES, BEGAN TO CRACK...



CHARLTON COULDN'T HEAR THOSE WORDS; BUT HIS SUPERB INSTINCT FOR COMMAND CHOSE THE RIGHT MOMENT TO LAUNCH THE COUNTER ATTACK...



YELLING IN THE SAVAGERY OF THE BATTLE, THE MEN OF THE 10TH. HURLED THEMSELVES ON THE NAZIS, AND FLUNG THEM REELING BACK.



Jaws Of Hell

THEIR AMMUNITION NEARLY SPENT, GASPING, THIRSTY AND EXHAUSTED, THE 10TH. AT LAST REACHED THEIR OBJECTIVE LINE, A LOW CREST DOMINATING THE FAR SIDE OF THE RIVER. HERE CHARLTON HALTED THEM AND REGROUPED.



UP WITH THE 2ND. RIFLES CAME THE BRIGADIER... HE SPOKE BRIEFLY TO CAPTAIN JACK CHARLTON...



THE WARM GLOW OF APPRECIATION FROM THE BRIGADIER'S WORDS CURDLED A LITTLE IN CHARLTON AS HE SAW PAUL LAWRENCE HOBBLING UP. AND LAWRENCE HEARD THE BRIGADIER'S WORDS OF PRAISE FOR THE MAN WHO HAD ONCE BEEN HIS LORRY DRIVER...



MAYBE IT WAS UNGRACIOUS ... A POOR SORT OF APOLOGY ... BUT THAT WARMTH IN CHARLTON FELT RIGHT NOW. LAWRENCE WOULD NEVER WORRY HIM AGAIN.



Jaws Of Hell

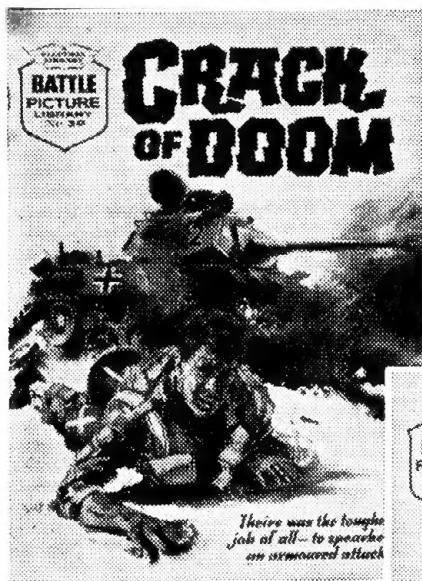
THE 10TH. BATTALION — THOSE OF IT WHO STILL SURVIVED — WALKED BACK OUT OF THE INFERNO. THEY MARCHED PROUDLY AS MEN WHO HAVE FOUGHT WELL AND WON. AND AT THEIR HEAD MARCHED CAPTAIN JACK CHARLTON, A MODEST MAN, BUT A MAN WHO HAD PROVED THAT THE FORCE OF COMMAND BURNED STRONGLY WITHIN HIM.



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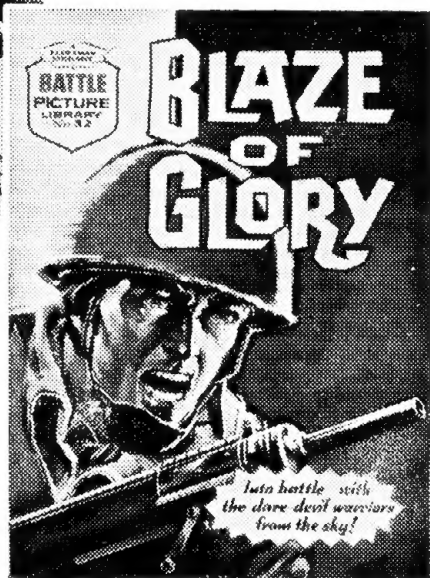


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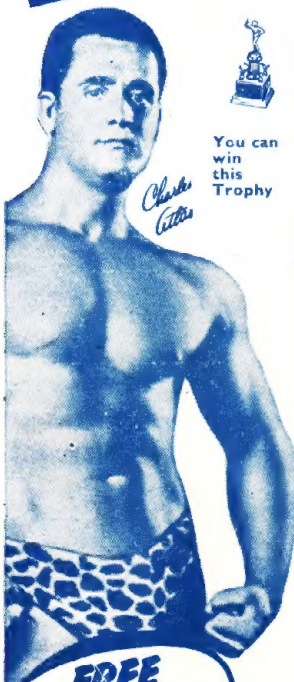
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